

BRIEFING PAPER FOR THE PRESIDENT'S PRESS CONFERENCE

February 7, 1963

SUBJECT: What are We Going to Do About Cuba?

QUESTION: Virtually everyone in the Administration expresses concern over the continued presence of these Soviet elements in Cuba, yet there is no outward indication that the U.S. is actively pressing for their removal. What are the facts in this regard?

There are similar reports that members of Congress are being deluged with mail inquiring "What are we going to do about Cuba?" What steps short of the use of force are being contemplated: 1) through the OAS with regard to the Cuban situation in general, and 2) with respect to multilateral or unilateral efforts on the part of the U.S. to bring about the removal of Soviet forces from Cuba?

CURRENT SITUATION REPORT:

The delay of the Soviets in withdrawing their troops, as you suggested they would in the November 20 press conference, has prompted rising criticism of the Administration for failing to "do something" about Cuba.

Senator Keating, for example, has been taking the position that we must solve the Cuban problem now, when it is still possible to do so with conventional weapons, rather than waiting and being forced, perhaps, to use nuclear weapons. Others, including Senator Stennis, have taken the position that we must get tough with Cuba, that somehow Cuba must be dealt with. Few responsible people urge an unprovoked invasion of the island, but this course of action seems implicit in the increasing calls for action.

Also prompting criticism is the fact that intelligence estimates of the number of Soviet personnel in Cuba have been consistently revised upward during the past few months, usually after someone like Keating has claimed there are more troops there than official sources state. This has given rise to claims that the American people are not being told everything about the situation.

Meanwhile, Secretary Rusk, in his news conference of February 1 was asked if we have any indications from the Russians whether they intend to keep the Soviet troops in Cuba or eventually get them out? The Secretary replied: "No clear indication. There had been earlier, as the President indicated in his November 20 press conference, that some of these forces would be leaving in due course and there was no precise time limit on that. But the building of barracks indicates that due course is perhaps not very fast...We have not had a schedule given to us or offered to us by the other side."

Answering another question as to the U.S. view in case the Soviet troops "dig in" in Cuba, the Secretary said: "If it is clear that this substantial military presence is there and that Cuba is itself going to be used as a base for further interference in the hemisphere, then of course this can get to be a very serious question again."

Asked if the United States has been prodding the Russians to get their military units out of Cuba "a little faster," the Secretary replied: "I think there is no misunderstanding whatever on their side about what our view of this is."

The Secretary was also asked about a related matter, the high-level U.S. reappraisal of U.S. long-range Cuban policy of which the Latin American governments were reportedly advised a month ago. Mr. Rusk replied that the reassessments have been going on adding: "We have sought the cooperation of other governments in the hemisphere to find out what, in fact, is happening in the hemisphere in relation to the Cuban problem, and in connection with such things as the movement of funds or the movement of agents from Cuba into other countries of the hemisphere, and also discussing with them the policy questions of how we might proceed on that question."

SUGGESTED POINTS IN REPLY:

The Secretary of State has publicly indicated our deep concern over the continued presence of Soviet combat units in Cuba. He recently characterized the situation as abnormal.

During the missile crisis we concentrated our attention first on the offensive missiles and then upon the IL-28 bombers. Our immediate attention is devoted to these military personnel who are trickling out at a rate less than we had expected.

The Cuban problem remains one of the most complex and difficult confronting the United States. As I said on September 13, we should lose neither our nerve nor our head. We intend to continue to press on the economic and political fronts, both multilaterally and unilaterally, in order to isolate Cuba and insure through surveillance and other means at our disposal that Cuba can not threaten the security of this country nor that of our neighbors.